

THE LAWC - A PLACE FOR PEOPLE TO TURN WHEN LOCAL PUBLIC OFFICIALS ARE UNRESPONSIVE

Pinckney Wood, LAWCA President

In September, 2012, a truck ran over a dog. The dog was seriously injured and the driver of the truck left the scene.

People in the neighborhood called for help from the authorities so that the dog could be cared for. The authorities did respond as a matter of record, but without diligence. The situation was considerably mishandled.

One of the neighbors, very upset over the incident, made a slide presentation to tell the story. It can be seen at: <http://lawca.org/Valiant/#slides> (best viewed using the Microsoft Internet Explorer browser which allows the poignant background music to play). Please view it.

The incident was one example of circumstances that are common over a good bit of Louisiana. People seek help for an animal that is in distress, or for one that is being abused; the response from authorities is wanting. It may be that they are at a loss to respond appropriately or, it seems in some cases, there is little or no concern; help for animals is utterly lacking. On the other hand, in some areas of Louisiana, the authorities are prepared and do cover pleas for help appropriately. The promotion of uniform and consistent methods for the handling of animal abuse issues across Louisiana would benefit people who actively seek to help animals in distress, and it would benefit the animals themselves.

Enter the Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission (LAWC). The LAWC, after more than a decade since its inception in 2001, is finally beginning to live up to its promise. It has been inspecting and reporting with regard to parish and municipal animal public sheltering and impoundment facilities all over the state. The findings range from well-run, up-to-date situations to conditions of deplorable neglect. The auxiliary of the LAWC, a separate and non-profit organization formed to provide support to the LAWC, has been acting on complaints with less than a handful of active agents (who have been donating their services for the most part, because there has been next to no LAWCA funding).

The LAWC must focus on several things that will help in cases such as the one mentioned above. It must provide guidance for people both in the proper care of animals and in what to do when they need to seek help for an animal in distress. It must provide guidance, where needed, for governments and emergency responders in matters of animal emergencies, and it must intervene to help people help animals after they have sought help from local authorities and did not receive it.

The LAWC (represented by the LAWC Auxiliary (LAWCA)) has no police powers. Its LAWCA agents must work through local authorities whenever direct LAWC intervention is not practical, or where LAWC intervention efforts are rebuffed by the person who is the subject of a complaint.

The LAWC is an entity of state government under the Governor's Office of Community Programs. As such it does garner respect from local authorities. The connection of the LAWC to the Office of the Governor encourages local authorities to work with the LAWC in addressing animal emergencies.

The LAWC does not intend that it be the first place people come with animal emergencies. It doesn't have the resources to act as a primary source of help for every case. However, the LAWC can and will help after there has been no appropriate response from local authorities: animal control, police, or sheriff. The LAWC has contacts both with local governments and with local humane and rescue organizations throughout Louisiana. Using this network, the LAWC can facilitate timely help.

When its help is required, the LAWC may be alerted to problem situations through the abuse reporting form on this website, or the similar form on the website of the LAWCA <http://lawca.org/>.

For urgent situations, the LAWCA needs to have a telephone hot-line so it can adequately deal with calls. Currently, there is a phone number indicated on this website and that of the LAWCA, but it is the personal cell-phone number of an uncompensated LAWC/LAWCA officer. As more people hear about LAWC services, a compensated staff will be essential. Also, in hearing from the public about their problems in getting help, it's clear that LAWCA agents could be more effective if they had enforcement authority and training in applying it. These are things that should be easily accomplished. The LAWCA already has two agents trained and experienced as law enforcement officers.

The LAWCA encourages public support so that its current efforts (and hopefully enhanced future efforts) can be funded.

The public is encouraged to donate to the LAWCA through its website.